

January 14, 2009

Dr. Jill Constantine, Deputy Director
What Works Clearinghouse
PO Box 2393
Princeton, NJ 08543-2393

Re: Beginning Reading Intervention Report
Wilson Reading System

Dear Dr. Constantine:

I am contacting you in the hope that you will consider our appeal with regard to the What Works Clearinghouse Report on the Wilson Reading System®. Our Counsel addressed a letter to you in September, 2007 fully explaining the nature of our concerns with the WWC Report. It is attached for your reference as is a letter of support and clarification from the principal investigator. I understand the timing of that letter to you was not ideal as the administration of WWC was, at the time, in transition from American Institute for Research to Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Considerable time has passed since the WWC Intervention Report on Wilson Reading System was released, yet we continue to receive feedback that the Report and particularly the Tables and Figures on your website are misleading and negatively impacting decisions about Wilson Reading System by school administrators.

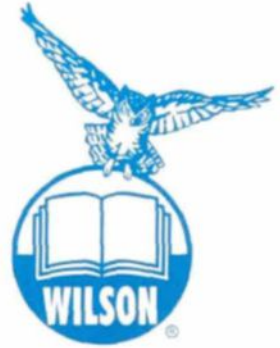
We would very much appreciate the opportunity to have a conversation with you regarding suggested clarifications of the information in question at a time that is convenient for you. I will follow this letter with a call to your office to see if a conference call with you can be arranged. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

(b)(6)

Paul J. Tortolani
Vice President of Education

cc (b)(6)



September 11, 2007

Dr. Jill Constantine
What Works Clearinghouse
PO Box 2393
Princeton, NJ 08543-2393

Dear Dr. Constantine:

I received your name from Teresa Duncan of the American Institutes for Research who had been our contact for What Works Clearinghouse (WWC). I am contacting you because of the response we have received from some of our customers to the What Works Clearinghouse Report on the Wilson Reading System® (WRS).

First, please allow me to give you some background information necessary to appreciate our inquiry. In the spring of 2007, the WWC informed Barbara Wilson, the author of the Wilson Reading System, and the Wilson Language Training Corporation (WLTC), its publisher, that the WRS was being included in its Beginning Reading Intervention Report. In April, 2007, Barbara Wilson sent a letter to Dr. Kathryn Drummond of the WWC making it clear that the one available study meeting the WWC evidentiary standards did not provide a complete evaluation of the WRS. (*See National assessment of Title I interim report—Volume II: Closing the reading gap: First year findings from a randomized trial of four reading interventions for striving readers, aka the "Haan Study"*). In the Haan Study, the WRS was modified at the request of the researchers to eliminate its comprehension and vocabulary components so that a specific hypothesis about the impact of word level instruction could be tested.

On June 29, 2007, WLTC was notified that the WWC Report on the WRS would be posted on July 2, 2007. Despite the earlier letter of Barbara Wilson pointing out the Haan study design, the advance copy of the WWC Report did not indicate that a modified version of the WRS had been used in the study.

For that reason, Wilson indicated to Dr. Drummond that we found the WWC Report to be misleading and inaccurate. In response, the WWC agreed to add a single sentence to the program description in the Report noting that "only word level components of the WRS were implemented" in the single study reviewed by the WWC. The revised report was posted on July 5, 2007. It states that the WRS was found to have potentially positive effects on alphabets and no discernible effects on fluency and comprehension.

On July 5, 2007, the same day the Report was posted, the principal investigator in the Haan Study, Dr. Joseph Torgesen, communicated to the WWC that he was concerned that the WWC Report on the WRS would be misleading to educational practitioners. I have forwarded a copy of his email for your reference. Dr. Torgesen asked the WWC in the interest of both fairness and good science to make it clear that the comprehension and vocabulary portions of the WRS were not implemented at the request of the researchers conducting the study.

We appreciate the modifications that were made to the WWC Report in response to Dr. Torgesen's request. Unfortunately, we have learned first hand that these changes were not enough to prevent the WWC Report from misleading the public. Our concern that one reading the Report does not take away from it that WRS was not fully implemented in the one study that WWC considered for its analysis has proven to be well founded. The result of the misunderstanding is not only potential damage to Wilson, but also the very disheartening reality that in some cases we may be denied the opportunity to help struggling readers. To remedy the damage that has been done and in Dr. Torgesen's words, in the interest of fairness, we request that the following additional changes be made to the WWC Report.

We see that a footnote is present on the chart in Appendix A3.1 Summary of Statistically Significant or Substantially Important Positive Findings indicating that a modified version excluding the comprehension and vocabulary portions of the WRS was implemented in the one study analyzed. We would like to request that WWC provide a similar footnote in the columns for comprehension and fluency where a question mark is now shown on the chart titled Effectiveness Ratings for Beginning Reading Programs. It would also be clarifying if it is noted in the left hand column where Wilson Reading System is named that it was a modified version. The feedback that we have received is that this chart is what is being discussed and shared by interested parties. A notation on the chart that reiterates what WWC has been willing to add to the written report is warranted.

Essentially, we request that wherever the WWC indicates that there were no discernable effects in comprehension and fluency using the WRS, it be noted that the WRS was modified in the one study analyzed at the request of the researchers to exclude its comprehension and vocabulary components. Specifically, in addition to the Effectiveness Ratings Chart noted above, a footnote is needed on the Effectiveness Report findings screen, in Figure 2- Fluency: Average Improvement, in Figure 3- Comprehension: Average Improvement, and in Table 1 "Effectiveness Ratings for 11 Dropout Prevention Programs in 3 Domains."

Thank you for your efforts in responding to our concerns. I look forward to working with you to achieve a fair result for Wilson.

Sincerely,

(b)(6)

Mary-Janet McCafferty
General Counsel
Wilson Language Training Corporation

Hi Teresa,

I've just finished reading the report published by the WWC on the Wilson Reading System. I thought you did a fine job in describing the program, and I also noted that you clearly spelled out that the study we did of Wilson and several other intervention programs used a modified, or limited, version of the program, in order to test a specific hypotheses about the impact of word level instruction vs. instruction that provided both word-level and vocabulary/comprehension instruction. The Wilson program was asked to participate in the word-level only part of the study, and they carefully complied with the study protocol, and thus did not include the vocabulary and comprehension aspects of their program. You have said this in your report, but I'm concerned that the report will still be misleading to educational practitioners for two reasons. First, in the only highlighted text in the document that describes the findings, you used these words; **The WWC found *Wilson Reading System* to have potentially positive effects on alphabetics and no discernible effects on fluency and comprehension.**

It seems to me, as the PI on this study, it would have been more fair to Wilson, and also more correct, to say something like: "The WWC found the modified version of the Wilson Reading System used in this study to have..."

Also, in the summary section (which is the take away message a lot of folks will leave with, you need a final qualifier after the sentence ending "....no discernable effects in fluency or comprehension" that would read something like, " It should be clearly noted, however, that the comprehension and vocabulary components of the Wilson Reading System were not used at the request of the researchers conducting the study."

I want to communicate as clearly as I can both that the Wilson people complied very precisely with the study protocol, and they also expressed some reservations at the time about focusing only on the word-level components of their program. At this point in time, I regret implementing "named programs" in only limited versions because of the fact that it does not produce a fair evaluation of their program as it is marketed and implemented in schools. However, we had to go with the "two intervention classes" in our design in order to meet power requirements. I'm hoping that you can be even clearer than you presently are in your report about the limited version of the Wilson System used in this study, in the interests of both fairness to the Wilson people and in the interests of good science.

Best,

Joe Torgesen

Joseph K. Torgesen
W. Russell and Eugenia Morcom Chair of Psychology and Education
Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University
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850-644-7752

From: What Works
Sent: Tuesday, February 03, 2009 4:28 PM
To: 'info@WilsonLanguage.com'
Subject: What Works Clearinghouse -- letter from Paul Tortolani (Ref. 973)

Dear Mr. Tortolani:

Jill Constantine asked us to let you know that she received your letter of January 14, 2009 describing your concerns about the What Works Clearinghouse intervention report on the Wilson Reading System.

We are currently reviewing the issues you raise regarding noting that a modified version of the Wilson Reading System was used in the Torgesen, et al., 2006 study. We will prepare a written response within 60 to 90 days.

Thank you for your patience.

What Works Clearinghouse

The What Works Clearinghouse was established by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences to provide educators, policymakers, researchers, and the public with a central and trusted source of scientific evidence of what works in education. For more information, please visit <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>.

What Works Clearinghouse **WWC**

A central and trusted source of scientific evidence for what works in education.

March 13, 2009

Paul Tortolani
Wilson Language Training
Corporate Headquarters
47 Old Webster Road
Oxford, MA 01540

Reference: 2009002

Dear Mr. Tortolani:

Jill Constantine forwarded me your January 14, 2009 letter (and the accompanying September 11, 2007 letter) concerning the What Works Clearinghouse's (WWC's) Beginning Reading topic report. As the WWC's Deputy Director in charge of ensuring quality and consistency, it is my job to review concerns such as yours. Let me assure you that we take seriously all concerns about the accuracy and usability of WWC products.

As noted in the correspondence, the WWC Wilson Reading intervention report now indicates that the Torgeson et al. did not implement the fluency, comprehension and vocabulary components of the Wilson Reading System. What remains is Wilson Language Training's concern that the WWC Beginning Reading topic report as well as the WWC "Rating of Effectiveness" table in the intervention report do not contain similar language.

WWC topic reports (and by extension, the WWC website "Create Your Own Summary" search tool) are intended to present summary statistics from individual intervention reports. Similarly, the "Rating of Effectiveness" tables in individual intervention reports are intended to summarize across individual studies. It is WWC policy not to annotate these summary tables with information about individual studies.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please let me know.

Sincerely,

(b)(6)

Scott Cody
Deputy Director
What Works Clearinghouse

What Works Clearinghouse **WWC**

A central and trusted source of scientific evidence for what works in education.

March 13, 2009

TO:

Paul Tortolani

Wilson Language Training

FAX: 508-368-2300

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FROM:

Scott Cody

What Works Clearinghouse

PAGES: 2 total
